

Bridges to Community

building communities, changing lives



2010 Annual Report

Meeting Basic Needs in 2010



Executive Director Kevin Mestrich (l); and Board Chair Bart Tyler (r)



As we looked back on 2010, it became clear that it was a year of stabilization and steadily moving forward for Bridges to Community. In all areas of program, leadership and finance, we made great progress toward our goal of a shared work experience to provide basic needs in Nicaraguan Communities. We are proud to share some of those accomplishments from last year.

A Few Program Highlights

This past year, through Bridges' **Education Program** we constructed three schools in the communities of Las Perlas, Amparo, and Fonseca, all of which were completed on time and on budget. These were the first school buildings that our organization has built since 2002 and most importantly nearly 200 young children are now receiving their education in clean, safe, and modern facilities. The school in Amparo is especially noteworthy as it was designed specifically as a multipurpose, sustainable prototype that is the first of its kind in Central America.

As a part of Bridges' **Health Program**, water projects in the Siuna region were among the important contributions we made last year to improve conditions for children and their families. By partnering with other organizations with experience in developing clean water projects, we also increased Bridges' capacity to help more people get access to this life source.

At the same time, the **Housing Program** continued steadily onward as hundreds of North Americans traveled to Nicaragua to jointly work with community members to construct 70 homes in 2010. Between all of Bridges' programs, a total of 789 volunteers shared their experience, labor, and skills.

Leadership Strengthening

Bridges to Community's **board of directors** grew from 18 to 21 members last year becoming a more active and diverse group. Double

the number of board members went on the second annual trip to Nicaragua in 2010. And all participated in the first strategic planning session producing a two year plan with goals and objectives for Bridges' future.

There was an emphasis on **staff development** in 2010 that included creating and filling the positions of grant writer and coordinator of service learning. The compensation package for staff improved their benefits and salaries to make Bridges a more marketable and competitive employer. Staff was provided opportunities for advancing learning including participation in a first aid training. The Bridges **communication and marketing strategy** was expanded producing two print newsletters, six E-Blasts, a new general brochure, a planned giving brochure, a revamped website and a dynamic Facebook fan page.

Financial Overview

We are extremely pleased to report that Bridges to Community continues to establish a solid financial base that is now allowing us to explore possibilities for expanding to a new country as well as into new communities in Nicaragua.

It is due to the continued strong commitment of our volunteers and supporters as well as the hard work of our staff that Bridges to Community has had such a successful year. **We can not thank you enough** for all that you have done and we look forward to sharing an exciting future together with you.

Thank You!

Kevin Mestrich,
Executive Director

Bart Tyler,
Board Chair

"One of the strengths of Bridges is that we have a very broad support base...it is an excellent marriage of trip participants, annual giving and project giving (grants)...all coming together to build the organization."

In 2010, Bridges to Community volunteers and Nicaraguans together built seventy homes continuing the commitment to provide safe, healthy dwellings for families with children and a woman's name on the legal ownership papers. One addition to Bridges' housing program this past year was the provision of free legal assistance to families to help them obtain land titles so that homes could be built for them. Bridges contracted with a Nicaraguan attorney with a specialty in municipal law in order to assist with this often expensive, complicated, and time-consuming task that was holding up our constructing homes for some of those most in need.



The leader of the Portillo community committee in Nindiri came and spread the word that Bridges to Community was accepting applications for new homes. He saw our need and we became one of the first houses to be built. I'm going to do volunteer work to build the next houses in our community. It is different when you own your own house. You feel more independent and self empowered and it gives your family a real sense of pride.

— Francisca, mother of two daughters ages 10 and 2 years

Housing

Education



I finally understood that the North American volunteers who came to work in our community wanted to learn what our lives were like. They were always asking what do you want for your community? And I would tell the groups 'Education!'
— Juan Gonzalez
leader of the Fonseca Community

In 2010 Bridges to Community built three schools to create more opportunities for Nicaragua's next generation. Volunteers partnered with local community members to construct not only a new school in Fonseca, Siuna but also two additional schools in the com-

munities of Amparo (Siuna) and Las Perlas (Ticuantepé). By the end of the year, over 200 children a day were attending these clean, safe, and modern educational facilities.

On the first trip to Nicaragua you are struck by the visuals, the differences between where we come from and the poverty of the people and their living conditions. But each time you return, your perceptions go much deeper. You develop an understanding of the people and the meaning of community. That's when the true learning begins...

I find that there is an unconditional acceptance of the Nicaraguan people for the Bridges volunteers. We are embraced and welcomed into their communities with great compassion and warmth. This causes the volunteers to examine their own attitudes towards the acceptance of people in their own world. I've seen the impact on other volunteers – business leaders as well as the young people – it's a powerful experience.

*- Angelo Mangia
President, Standard Funding*

Service Learning

I learned so much from the experience, I don't know where to begin....I just see everything differently, and feel differently about myself and the world around me; education actually feels like a privilege and I wonder how on earth a house as big as mine was built...

I know that everything I have learned, and my new perceptions, will stay with me for the rest of my life. The trip has also altered the course of my life in that I definitely plan on doing more community service work, and generally just be more dedicated to helping people across our world.

*- Mariya
Hanover High School*

In 2010, Bridges to Community sent 789 North American volunteers to Nicaragua to work jointly with community members in Masaya, Ticuantepe, Nindiri and Siuna. The volunteers included high school and college students, medical professionals, faith-based organizations, business professional leaders as well as groups of friends and families. Approximately half of those who traveled to Nicaragua last year had made at least one Bridges trip before. All together they built 70 homes, 3 schools, 10 latrines, 17 smoke reducing stoves and several water projects. More importantly they shared the experiences of laughing, playing, crying and learning about each other's lives.



Health

In 2010 Bridges to Community focused heavily on water projects as a means to address basic health issues, especially in the Siuna region where potable water is a precious life source. By constructing a gravity fed water projects in Rancho Alegre and Rosa Grande, 38 children and adults are now able to turn on a faucet and see the “magic” of clean water pouring out nearby their homes. In the same year Bridges also provided 24 water storage containers as well as dozens of water filters to schools and families. Now with better health and more time freed up from carting water long distances, the children and women of the region are more likely to attend school, work, and get involved with their communities.



When Bridges to Community started working with our community, our families' health needs were helped with the mosquito nets, latrines, cooking stoves and water filters that were made available. Then in 2008, Hurricane Alma washed the mountainside down into the river contaminating our water source and washing away the bridges. Last year, all of our families agreed - we needed a water project.
— Atonosio Calderon
leader of Rancho Alegre Community



Economic Development

Bridges to Community's Economic Development Program has focused this past year on assisting farmers in cooperating communities in the remote region of Siuna with cacao projects. Helping these communities to buy the seeds, learn how to successfully grow these plants and market their product has made for increased financial stability of the participating families. These projects are also improving the environment with the growth of the fruit trees. While entire families are all involved in farming the cacao crops, the women are also learning how to make chocolate in their homes.

In order to gain additional knowledge and share their information with their participating neighbors about growing and improving cacao plants, one person from each rural community was selected to attend intensive seminars at the local Siuna public university. These new "consultants" have not only helped to expand their crops, but they have learned to improve the cacao species by modern cross fertilization methods. Bridges' is committed to the belief that by empowering communities with not only funds but knowledge and skills, the economic benefits of the projects we facilitate will continue long after we are gone.

We see the cacao project in our community as a whole family involvement. Not to become rich but to improve family (not individual) life. Cacao is a way to get income for the families and reforest the land at the same time.

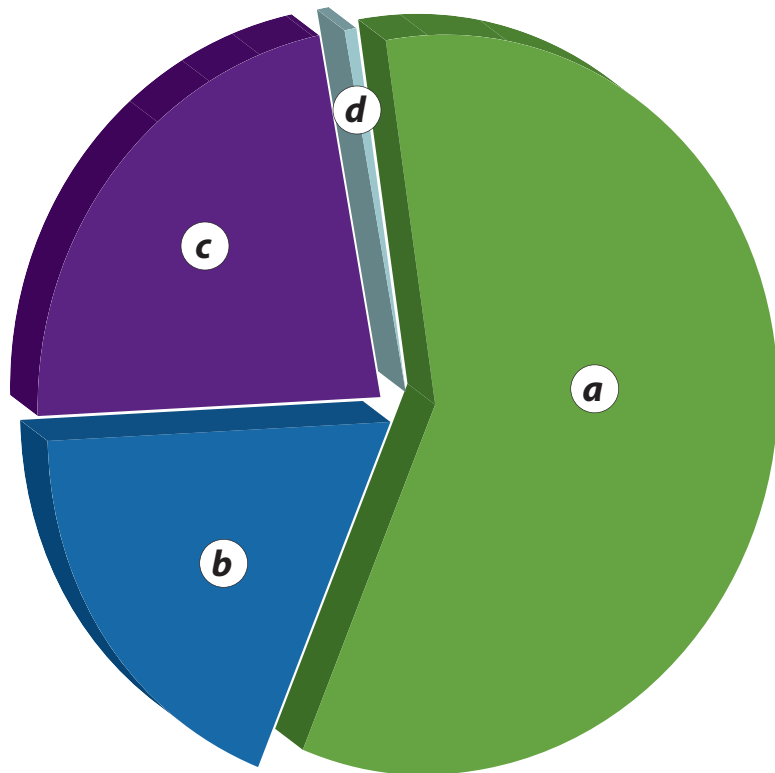
*— Lazaro
the resident cacao consultant
for Rancho Alegre*

Revenue

Revenue

(a) Trip Participant Fees	\$ 1,278,691	58.64%
(b) Restricted Project Contributions	\$ 379,751	17.42%
(c) Unrestricted Contributions	\$ 329,328	15.10%
(d) Other Income	\$ 9,928	0.46%

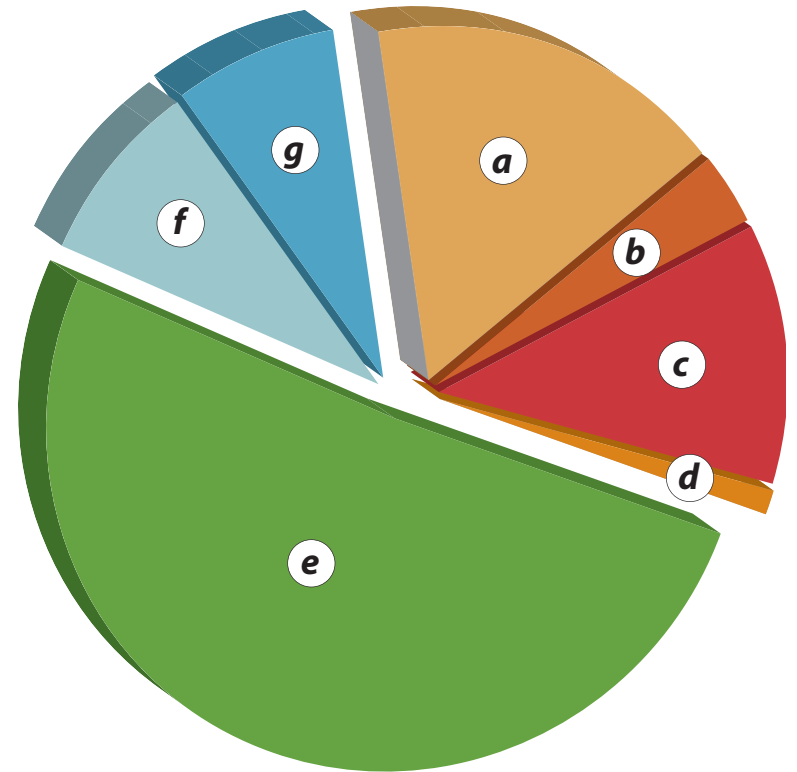
Total Revenue \$ 2,180,515



Beginning Net Assets: \$ 347,807
 Change in Net Assets: + \$ 281,256
 Ending Net Assets: \$ 629,063



Expenses



(a) Housing Program	\$ 318,632	16.78%
(b) Health Program	\$ 64,894	3.42%
(c) Education Program	\$ 223,842	11.79%
(d) Economic Development Program	\$ 25,187	1.33%
(e) Service Learning Program	\$ 969,081	51.02%
Subtotal Program Services	\$ 1,601,636	84.33%

(f) Fundraising Expenses	\$ 159,006	8.37%
(g) Administrative Expenses	\$ 138,617	7.30%
Subtotal Supporting Services	\$ 297,623	15.67%

Total Expenses: \$ 1,899,259

Our Mission

Bridges to Community is a nonprofit service learning and community development organization that brings people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds together to work, learn and reflect. Through the process of working in local communities, Bridges promotes community and personal transformation, cross-cultural partnerships, sustainable community development, and a commitment to be agents of change in our communities, both locally and globally.

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